The Last of His Tribe

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The Last of His Tribe

by rakhalofthestars

Summary

Boothill and the importance of his hair.

Notes

Woah, it's been a while since I've written anything :P I've recently gained a big hyperfixation on Boothill which hopefully explains my absence here 😞

There are quite a lot of implications of Boothill being indigenous American as well as Latino which is why I decided to write this ♡ I tried my best to do as much research as possible when writing about the importance of hair in indigenous cultures but please don't hesitate to let me know if anything that I wrote is incorrect or disrespectful in any way ♡♡

As always, reader is gender neutral in this fic and although it's tagged as an "x reader" fic, the full extent of your relationship with him is unspecified so it's more ambiguous and you can interpret it however you want.

Spoilers for Boothill's backstory!!
TW for one self-deprecating/suicidal thought

Hair holds memories.

That's what Boothill had been taught ever since he first learned to understand the words of those around him. It's what the people of Aeragan-Espharshel believed in. That the hair was an extension of one's spirit, one's connection to the land.

As a young boy, Boothill wasn't quite sure if he believed in those teachings or not. He found it bothersome to have long, white hair that cascaded down past his shoulders, especially in the sweltering heat when he'd be out lending a hand on the ranch, taming the horses and farming sheep. Boothill could easily remember the times where he'd try to cut his hair off but Nick would always catch him before he could do so.

"I was only gonna cut a few inches off! Scout's honor, I was!" He'd protest to his adoptive father who'd simply turn a deaf ear at his words and give him a lecture instead. If Nick was in a bad mood, he'd call over Gray and then Boothill would have to stand there and receive double the lecture.

Looking back on those days now, Boothill can't help but find it all silly. Of course hair holds memories. Why wouldn't it? His hair holds the memories of how his adoptive fathers would stroke their hands over his head, even when he was well past the age of receiving such manners of affection. His hair holds the memories of how his adoptive sisters would always play with his hair, styling it in everything from a simple ponytail to the most outlandish hairdos that would put even the fanciest southern belle to shame. His hair will remember how his brothers would sometimes give him noogies for pulling a prank on them, it will remember how his gunslinging friends would ruffle and muss it all up for another job well done.

Boothill's hair remembers how his daughter used to babble and tangle her tiny fingers in the long locks, tugging at them while he'd wince and hiss softly, trying to pry her fingers away before she ended up ripping out any strands.

When his tribe was annihilated by the indiscriminate bombs from the IPC, Boothill came close to cutting his hair off. His grief knew no bounds during those dark and wretched days. It could've moved the tallest mountains. If it could've taken a physical form, it would've crushed the IPC with no difficulty.

For better or for worse, Boothill decided to keep his hair as it was. Even after he had changed his body and turned it into a killing machine, even after he had his eyes and teeth augmented, his red blood switched out for blue fuel. Even then, he kept his hair.

He just wasn't ready to say goodbye to that chapter of his history that those snow white locks of hair had witnessed.

For a long while, Boothill didn't take care of his hair. He couldn't bring himself to, almost as if he was afraid that washing it would also wash away the memories and the touch of his loved ones. For a long time, the ash from that fateful day continued to cling onto his hair, along with all sorts of dirt from the various missions the now Galaxy Ranger would go on.

When Boothill finally found the strength to try and take care of himself again, to try and take care of this extension of his spirit, he found that he couldn't. This time, there were no psychological barriers that stopped him. It all came down to this body that he'd given himself.

It was tough to wash his hair while trying to keep the water and soap from seeping into the grooves and crevices in his cybernetic body. It was hard when the long strands would get all tangled in the cracks of his hands that were no longer warm flesh but instead cold metal.

Thank the aeons that you were there for him.

Galaxy Rangers don't normally travel together, least of all working together. But you and him did.

Boothill couldn't figure out why he was so drawn to you, why he so easily allowed you past the metal plates that his body consisted of and into the lonely heart that was beating deep inside, hidden and well guarded from the cruel world. He just did.

Despite your closeness, it took the ranger a while before he gave you the permission to touch his hair. In the end, he was glad that he did.

And when you suggested helping him wash and braid his hair? He didn't even need to think twice before answering with a silent nod.

It took you and Boothill a few trials with no shortage of errors to figure out a safe way to wash his hair without risking electrocution on your part and malfunctioning on his part. But any obstacle can be overcome when given enough time.

As Galaxy Rangers, the two of you were almost constantly on the move and never stayed in one place for too long. So you had to make do with crashing in hotels and inns.

Boothill would always sit on the bathroom floor, his head tilted at the edge of the bathtub and allowing his hair to cascade into the tub. You'd be kneeling right beside him and would wash away the dirt and grime that built up after countless missions combined with days of neglect. Your fingers gently comb through the long locks, untangling the knots and sometimes, to both yours and his amusement, picking out little twigs and the like that had gotten tangled up.

These little sessions would often start out with Boothill chattering away about how he quote unquote "taught them muddle-fudgers a lesson" on your latest mission or some recent bounty that he had successfully completed. But it never took long before he'd fall silent. If he was feeling up for it, he might hum a little tune that Nick had taught him. But usually, it was just silence except for the sounds of water.

Neither you nor Boothill ever minded it. It was comforting, to indulge in this little bubble of tranquility. To try and hold on to it because Lan knows how Boothill misses the days which were filled with crude songs and gentle words.

As the suds of shampoo run down the drain, so too does Boothill's fears, worries and thoughts of how ~~it should've been him.~~

Once his hair is all clean and has regained its normal shine, all that's left is to dry it with a towel before combing through it. It used to take him a long time for his hair to regain its usual luster, but thanks to you and your insistence as well as diligence on taking care of him, it is easily achievable with just an hour or so of haircare.

Boothill likes to braid his hair. He didn't tend to do it often, usually due to the hair getting stuck in the crevices of his iron fingers. So you'd offer to do it for him instead.

With deft fingers, you section the beautiful locks into two before sectioning those two parts into three separate strands.

One for the body. One for the mind. One for the spirit.

You braid his hair into twin braids and in all his days since a part of him died along with his family, he has never looked happier.

Of course, he'll eventually take out the braids and wear his hair down to let his targets know that he's a warrior ready for battle.

But for now, Boothill will indulge in this small moment of peace with you. His eyes will flutter and close while his head rests on your lap as he's lulled to sleep by hands that he knows will always be there to take care of him. His braids will stay, preserving the memories of the planet where he's from, his culture, his heritage and his tribe.

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